



Spores on the wind: confronting colonial violence through the queer region in Ellen van Neerven's *Heat and Light*

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Abstract

In *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora*, queer feminist scholar Gayatri Gopinath argues that the region and the personal operate as “alternative archives” that disrupt hegemonic discourses, enabling the apprehension of marginalised histories. This paper argues that the literary work *Heat and Light* by Mununjali author Ellen van Neerven foregrounds the region and the personal, exposing colonialism’s ongoing violence and queering Australian identity narratives. Like spores on the wind, the “contagion of trauma” permeates its familial genealogies, settler/colonial histories and environmental legacies. Its imagined regions – Indigenous country and countries – are inhabited by the queer: identities simultaneously under construction and unravelling, after queer scholar Annamarie Jagose, alongside snake-like women who make love to the wind, plantpeople, man-eating tigers, horned killer camels, and more. Its fissured narratives challenge linear heteronormative temporal frames, evoking our “imbricated pasts and futures,” after Gopinath, ultimately stranding the reader with their discomfort. Using textural analysis, literary critique and queer theory, I examine how the work’s peripheral/elusive regions, unstable identities, and accretion of mobility maps undermine the nation, defying notions of the anthropocentric, belonging and ‘home’. By recognising “the imprints [hegemonic discourses] leave on our bodies, desires, and psyches in the present,” we enable queer ways of being and knowing beyond heteronormative constraints. *Heat and Light* destabilises patriarchal and white-settler norms, “perform[ing] new histories” and futures – irrevocably undercut with violence – for Australian identity narratives.

Keywords: Australian literature; First Nations literature; queer temporalities; queer theory; the region